



IOWA CHILD
ADVOCACY BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT



FY2021



Iowa Child Advocacy Board Annual Report

Respectfully submitted as required under Iowa Code §237.18(2)(c) and (7)(d)

The Iowa Child Advocacy Board (ICAB) is an independent board appointed by the Governor of Iowa to engage citizen involvement in child welfare issues. ICAB's core function is to operate two independent child advocacy programs designed to help protect Iowa children and their best interests while being served by the child welfare system: the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program and the Iowa Citizen Foster Care Review Board (ICFCRB) program.

The mission of the Iowa Child Advocacy Board is "advocating for the protection of Iowa's children and improvement of the child welfare system." This mission was achieved during the past year through the amazing work of 740 highly trained, dedicated volunteers and 37 professional staff who served a total of 2,435 of Iowa's abused or neglected children.

We are pleased to present the fiscal year 2021 annual report highlighting the great work accomplished through the Iowa Child Advocacy Board.



Iowa Child Advocacy Board Membership



Beth Myers, Chairperson

Garner, Iowa

Beth is presently a uniserv director with the Iowa State Education Association (ISEA); prior to her current position, she was the attorney for the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners (BOEE). Her professional career began as a secondary U.S. History and sociology teacher in the Clinton Community School District in eastern Iowa.

Beth's education includes a J.D. and a M.P.A. from Drake University and a B.A. in history from the University of Iowa. Volunteerism has always been an important facet of Beth's life; she has served and continues to serve on numerous organizations and boards that include: the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC), the Iowa Organization of Women Attorneys, the American Society of Public Administration, the Iowa State Bar Review School, and the Clinton Education Association.



Courtney Clarke

Waukee, Iowa

Courtney is an Institutional Portfolio Manager for PMA Asset Management and is responsible for oversight of all insurance, nonprofit and financial partner relationships. She previously served as Director of Communications for Miles Capital, where she oversaw all firm business development, marketing and client activities. Prior to joining Miles Capital, Courtney was in Investment Operations with Cargill Financial Markets, UK. She earned her BS in Business Management, International Business and a BA in French from Iowa State University. She and her husband love raising their four children in Iowa, and Courtney serves as Mayor of Waukee, Iowa.



Judge William Owens

Ottumwa, Iowa

Judge Owens, Ottumwa, was appointed to the bench in 1999. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Kansas in 1981 and his law degree from Drake University Law School in 1984. He served as Assistant Monroe County Attorney from 1984-1989 and Monroe County Attorney from 1990-1998. He also was in private practice in Albia until his appointment.

Judge Owens is Co-chair of the Advisory Committee, Iowa Supreme Court Children's Justice; is a member of the Children's Justice State Council; and is chair of the Juvenile Judge Committee of the Iowa Judge's Association.

In 2008 Judge Owens received the Supreme Court of Iowa Court Innovation Award for initiating a Family Treatment Court in Wapello County. In 2013 Judge Owens received the Harold E. Hughes, Exceptional Rural Professional - Award of Excellence given annually by the National Rural Drug Abuse Network. In 2018 Judge Owens was appointed to the National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Judicial Leadership Council. Judge Owens is married with three children and two grandchildren.

Marc Elcock

Indianola, Iowa

Photo and bio unavailable.



Wayne Schellhammer

Urbandale, Iowa

Wayne Schellhammer is a three-term member of the ICAB. Wayne has 40 years of experience in the healthcare industry with more than half of those as a senior executive. He has served as President and CEO of UnityPoint Clinics (Iowa Health), Pres/CEO of UnityPoint at Home (Iowa Health Home Care), led the IPO as Chairman and CEO for American Care Source (An ancillary services network company backed by John Pappajohn) currently is President and CEO of Regenexx, LLC. He has BS Degree in Health Sciences from the University of Minnesota and a passion to help the abused kids of Iowa



Mike Steele

Mt. Pleasant, Iowa

Married no children. I am a retired clinical and school social worker. I spent 20 plus years at a rural community mental health center and at Ottumwa Regional Health Center, doing inpatient, partial hospitalization, and outpatient therapy. I then worked for Great River AEA and Great Prairie AEA as a School Social Worker. I have done additional work in corrections, nursing homes, and private practice. My educational background is as follows; BA Psychology - Coe College, MA Counseling - University Northern IA, MSW - University of IA. I am a member of the Henry/Louisa FCRB, and the Community Partnership for Protecting Children - Henry County.



Dr. Angela Stokes, PhD

Sioux City, Iowa

Bio unavailable.



Alison K. Guernsey

Alison K. Guernsey is a Clinical Associate Professor at the University of Iowa College of Law where she teaches in and directs the Federal Criminal Defense Clinic. Under her supervision, law students represent indigent individuals charged with federal offenses in the U.S. District Courts for the Northern and Southern Districts of Iowa. Students also practice before the U.S. Courts of Appeals for the Eighth and Sixth Circuits.

Before joining the faculty, Alison was the Supervising Attorney for the Federal Defenders of Eastern Washington and Idaho, where she provided direct representation to indigent individuals charged with federal crimes.

Alison clerked for the Honorable Michael J. Melloy, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit (Cedar Rapids, IA), and the Honorable Karen Nelson Moore, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit (Cleveland, OH). Alison is a graduate of the University of Iowa College of Law and received her undergraduate degree from the University of Michigan.

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2021 Recommendations

- To our Judicial Branch stakeholders:
 - ICAB recommends continued acknowledgement of a child's sense of time and continued work towards meeting Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) timelines when children are removed from their family of origin. Family First legislation and case work strives to get families together, but the basic tenets of the legislation can delay permanency if both laws are not considered equally. Family First best practices and ASFA should work in tandem, affording families the opportunities to successfully receive services and reunite, while doing so expeditiously.

- To our Legislative Branch stakeholders: ICAB is at capacity with the number of kids it can serve with current staffing levels in Woodbury, Black Hawk, Johnson, Linn and rural northwest Iowa. Under current financial circumstances, despite efforts to procure grant and foundation funds, ICAB programs cannot grow to serve these additional areas of the state.
 - ICAB recommends the legislature consider an increase to our state appropriations in the amount of \$550,000 so ICAB can increase the amount of children it's able to serve in these communities.

- To our executive branch stakeholders:
 - ICAB advocates for continued and improved communication with both local and state office Department of Human Services staff, including cross training opportunities encompassing all child welfare partners regarding important topics such as Family First service array changes and potential impact of approved changes to administrative rules.





Court Appointed Special Advocate CASA Program

CASA of Iowa is mandated to function under the Iowa Child Advocacy Board per Iowa Code §237.18. CASA of Iowa recruits, trains and supports volunteer advocates who are appointed to the cases of Iowa children who have experienced abuse and neglect and are involved in Child or Family In Need of Assistance juvenile court proceedings.

Volunteer advocates must submit an application, provide personal references, participate in an in-person interview and extensive onboarding process, which includes 30 hours of pre-service training. Applicants are also subject to a full background check. As onboarding is completed, applicants are sworn in as CASA volunteers with the juvenile court.

The concept of volunteer court appointed advocacy, originally founded by a Seattle, WA juvenile court judge in 1976, helps to ensure the voices of Iowa's most vulnerable children are heard, respected and understood inside the courtroom. CASA volunteers are trained and advocate for these most basic of child welfare principles:

- All families have potential; realized or not yet realized. Families have protective factors that can be enhanced to mitigate risk to the child.
- Children experience trauma when separated from their family of origin. They should be with family when at all possible and safe. Children have an inherent and biological need to be with family.

CASA volunteers are appointed by judges and are tasked with reviewing the child's circumstances throughout the life of the case by keeping in contact with members of the child's team. CASA volunteers perform their primary advocacy by authoring a Report to the Court for each hearing, making recommendations about the child and family's needs, the child's wishes and what is in the child's best interest.

CASA advocacy is unique and very individualized. Even though the situations that bring families before the court may look similar, no two cases are the same. To this end, CASA of Iowa works diligently to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in all facets of our programming. The Child Advocacy Board provides child out-of-home placement information and data to CASA of Iowa to help us understand disproportionality among children and families represented in the child welfare system and advocate for families of color that may otherwise experience disparate outcomes.

CASA of Iowa Structure

CASA of Iowa is considered one program, but consists of a State Organization and eleven (11) Local CASA programs found throughout the state. These 11 local programs served 59 Iowa Counties in fiscal year 2021. The State Organization provides support to local programs, including but not limited to:

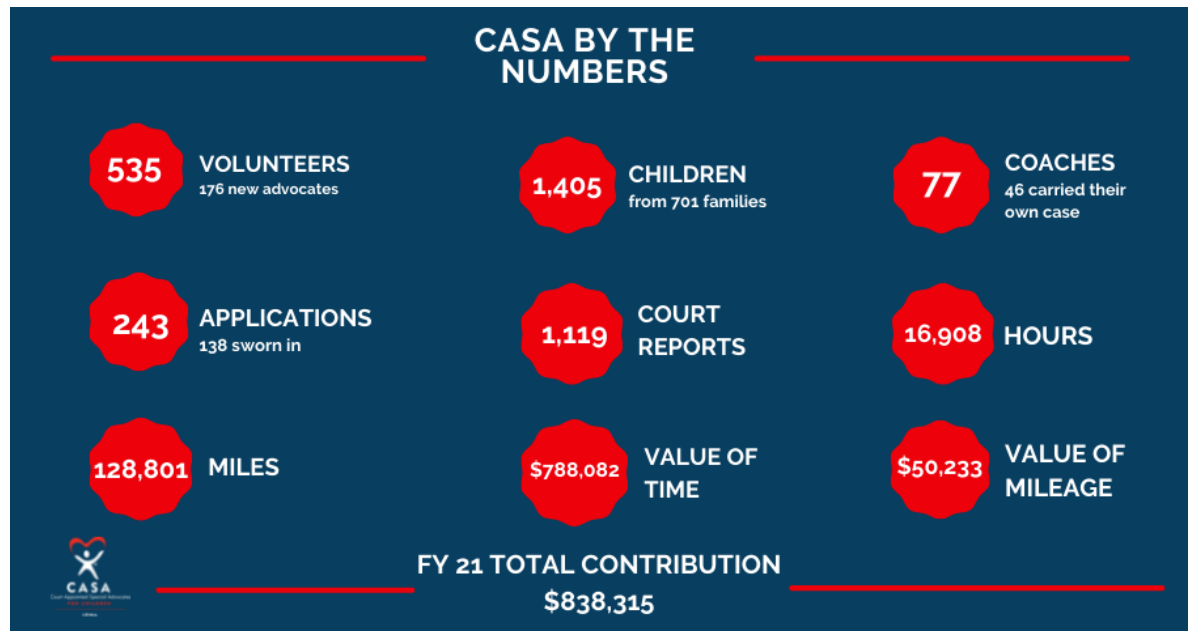
- Providing primary funding of office operations to include salary, benefits, office space, supplies, background checks, database access, training and technology
- Promotion of program awareness

- Creation, implementation and review of local program policy
- Planning with local programs to sustain programming and build capacity
- Supervision, coaching and professional development of local program staff
- Database access, financing and maintenance
- Financial management and bookkeeping
- Background check completion
- Maintain pre-service training material and continuing education of advocates by supplying materials and hosting platforms
- Compile data and documentation and pay renewal fees for National CASA/GAL Association reporting and membership
- Facilitation of quality assurance initiatives with local programs to ensure National CASA/GAL Association compliance
- Grant writing and management assistance
- Recruitment and marketing support

The CASA of Iowa State Organization and each of the 11 local programs are members of the National CASA/GAL Association for Children. Membership with the National CASA/GAL Association allows CASA of Iowa to use CASA branding, logo and marketing materials, apply for grant funding to fund projects and staffing, receive organizational, legal and policy support and participate with over 900 state and local CASA organizations across the nationwide network. In FY21, CASA of Iowa received grant funding from the National CASA/GAL Association to support CASA programming in the Dubuque area. Generally CASA of Iowa has been awarded at least one National CASA/GAL Association grant per year.

CASA of Iowa operates under the National CASA/GAL Association's Core Model by utilizing screened, trained and qualified community advocates who are appointed by the court to provide best interest advocacy for children and youth up to age 21, who are living in their family of origin's home or in out-of-home care and come before the court as a result of abuse or neglect as defined by Iowa's child welfare laws. All qualified CASA volunteers are screened per National CASA/GAL Association Standards, trained according to National CASA/GAL Training and Facilitation Standards and supported by staff or a CASA coach (peer equivalent) in accordance with National CASA/GAL Standards.





CASA volunteers completed 8,251 hours of continuing education training. The average CASA volunteer is assigned to one case an average of 17.7 months and stays with the program 60.3 months.

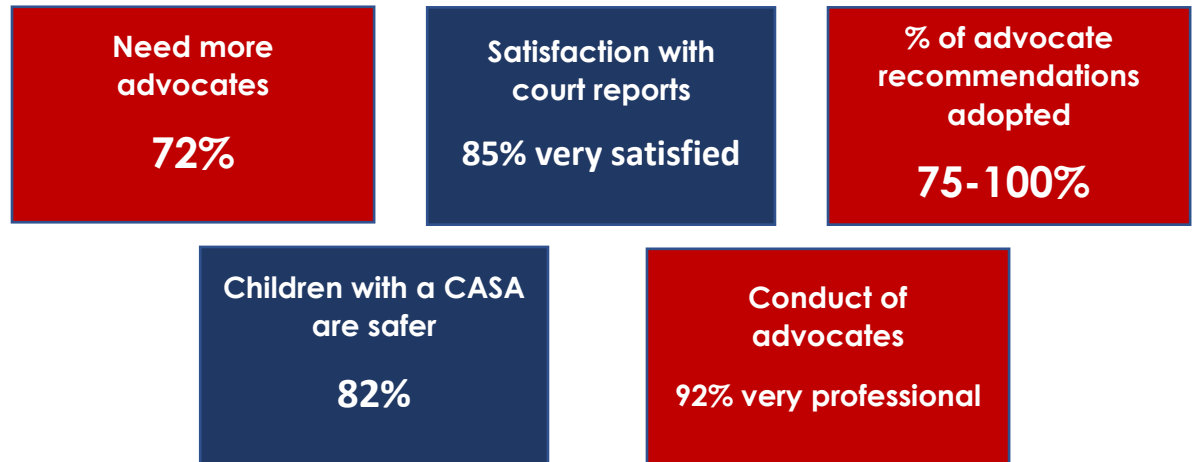
CASA Program Highlights

- The COVID-19 pandemic affected the way CASA volunteers performed their advocacy work in FY2021. Initially, there were barriers that prevented volunteers from performing their work as normal. Many CASA volunteers found ways to successfully continue their advocacy through socially-distanced visits, wearing masks or virtual meetings. By the late spring 2021, CASA of Iowa had resumed our policy requirement that volunteer advocates visit each child in-person every 30 days.
- The continued implementation of Family First legislation in Iowa's child welfare system was felt across all local CASA programs. CASA of Iowa continued to provide resources and training from DHS and the courts to our volunteers to help them understand Family First changes that impact families and the services they receive. While the court has historically assigned more difficult cases to the CASA program, volunteers report the newer cases to which they're assigned are incredibly complex.

This is likely because Family First legislation requires DHS to create safety plans with families, making every effort to keep children in their homes with their families, while receiving services. If a family has received services but has not achieved the desired outcomes or resolved the original safety issues, the case would then go before the court. CASA of Iowa is fully supportive of this concept, with the understanding that sometimes by the time the case comes before the court, the family has been under stress from prolonged crisis, and outcomes are not easily achieved. CASA of Iowa continues to work to understand the needs of volunteers assigned to these families, ensuring each volunteer feels supported, educated and prepared.

- In June 2021, CASA of Iowa deployed our annual Judges Survey to learn more about the impact of CASA programming through the eyes of Iowa's

juvenile judges. This year, the State Organization developed the survey, but asked local program staff to meet with judges in their area to complete the questionnaire. Of the 51 judges identified to be interviewed, 39 participated, a 76% response rate. 2021 CASA of Iowa Judicial Survey response data can be found [here](#). A few highlights:



Looking Ahead

The National CASA/GAL Association for Children is reviewing all State Organizations to determine if the organization is performing effectively by supporting its local programs and advocating for the needs of the children served in each state. In August 2021, the CASA of Iowa State Organization participated in a Highly Effective Standards Review Process with the National CASA/GAL Association. The review consisted of a document review of over 50 policies and plans, a two-day virtual interview, interviews with CASA of Iowa stakeholders and surveys of the CASA of Iowa local programs. CASA of Iowa hopes to receive the preliminary results of the review before the end of 2021.

Beginning in January 2022, each CASA of Iowa local program will complete a self-assessment for the National CASA/GAL Association to ensure the local program aligns with National CASA standards, expectations and the core model. This review will consist of meeting membership requirements, uploading documents, plans and policies and completion of a questionnaire. The self-assessment process is the first step in a full on-site review of programming anticipated to begin mid to late 2023.

Finally, the CASA of Iowa management team is diligently working to align program resources and staff with the needs across the state. This process includes planning for current needs, anticipated areas of future growth and the potential for expansion in select areas of the state in the near-future.

CASA Celebrates 35th Anniversary

We stand on the shoulders of giants! Those ‘giants’ are former Chief Justice of the Iowa Supreme Court W. Ward Reynoldson, and then Juvenile Court Referee Larry J. Eisenhower. They had the vision and passion to help children by bringing the CASA Program to Iowa. In late 1985, Chief Justice Reynoldson learned about CASA at a judicial conference in Reno, Nevada. At about the same time, a child placement study committee in Iowa recommended a child advocacy program for Iowa children in juvenile court. Chief Justice Reynoldson returned from Reno and appointed an Advisory Board to develop the Court Appointed Special Advocate Program in Iowa.

In January 1986, Iowa became the 47th state to adopt the CASA Program, with Juvenile Court Referee Larry J. Eisenhower as Chair of the Advisory Board, which included attorneys, community leaders and stakeholders, and DHS/juvenile court personnel. They met for eight months writing policies and procedures for CASA volunteers and establishing the forms, some which are still used today. The Board hired Janet Carl as the first Administrator and chose to start CASA as a pilot project in six counties (Plymouth, Sioux, & Woodbury) in NW Iowa, and three counties in central Iowa (Polk, Warren, & Marion). In August 1986, CASA Coordinators were hired for the 3rd & 5th Judicial Districts, and the first volunteer training was in October 1986. After two years as a project, the Judicial Branch adopted the CASA Program and over the next fifteen years, it expanded to 30 counties in Iowa.

In 2001, the Judicial Department experienced a severe budget deficit, and in November 2001, the CASA Program was cut. Following the announcement, there was an overwhelming response from the public asking the State not to drop such a valuable program for children. It’s my understanding that the legislators received more phone calls in support of reinstating our program than they ever received before for any cause! After several months of negotiating, the Legislative Branch took over the operations of the CASA program, and we were housed in the Ola Babcock Building. In June 2002, we moved to the Executive Branch under the direction of the Iowa Child Advocacy Board where we are today.

There’s another giant I would like to highlight, Judge David Soukup, Seattle, WA. Judge Soukup organized the first team of CASA volunteers in King County, WA in 1977. While sitting as a judge in juvenile court, he realized there was no one in the courtroom to provide a voice for the child. He was losing sleep and worried about making the wrong decision because he didn’t have enough information about the child’s situation. Judge Soukup put up a sign in the courthouse asking for anyone interested in volunteering to be an advocate to meet in his courtroom. The response was overwhelming, and the CASA Program became the fastest growing child advocacy program in the country.

There were skeptics early on, because this was the first time child abuse reports were released to someone other than a legal party. But our training is superb, and from the beginning, we stressed the importance of confidentiality. In our 35 years,

only a few volunteers have been relieved of their duties because of breaching confidentiality. Yes, we had to prove ourselves over and over, but that has made us stronger. The real difference the CASA makes is the value of one volunteer/one family, and the commitment to stay on the case until it is closed by the court. In that time, the CASA volunteer truly knows the child and knows the dynamics of the case. At the end of the hearing, the judge often says to the CASA, "Is there anything else you would like to add to your report?" Frequently the judge adopts the CASA recommendations.

When I interviewed for the local coordinator position in August 1986, interviewers asked the question, "Can you recruit 100 volunteers the first year?" I chuckled and said, "Absolutely not, because I would be looking for the very best, not just anyone!" I believe that has been our secret to success since the beginning. Judge Eisenhower advised me at one point that no one has the right to be a CASA; it's a privilege to be a CASA! I had a sign in my office that read CASA - a common person with an uncommon commitment - a commitment to visit the child and everyone on the case once a month, to write detailed reports to the court, attend court hearings and staff meetings, and make recommendations regarding the best interest of the child. That really is the heart and soul of the CASA Program. Yes, CASA volunteers are common citizens, but they have most definitely made an uncommon commitment and that has made all the difference. Because of that, we are celebrating 35 years of helping children!

I believe in CASA because I've seen it work for children over and over again: when the CASA report gives the judge information no one else has, when the CASA advocates for sibling visits because they are placed in different foster homes, when the CASA drives to an out-of-town placement to make sure the child's voice is heard, when the CASA stops by a parent's home consistently to find out who is involved with the child and whether the home is safe for the child, and when the CASA testifies to clarify important information. It's played out all across our state because of the commitment of CASA volunteers.

Congratulations to all for a productive, impactful and successful 35 years! Together we've made a difference in the lives of vulnerable children in Iowa!

by VeeAnn Cartwright, CASA Coordinator, 1986-2010, Retired, Friends of Iowa CASA & ICFCRB, 2011-2021

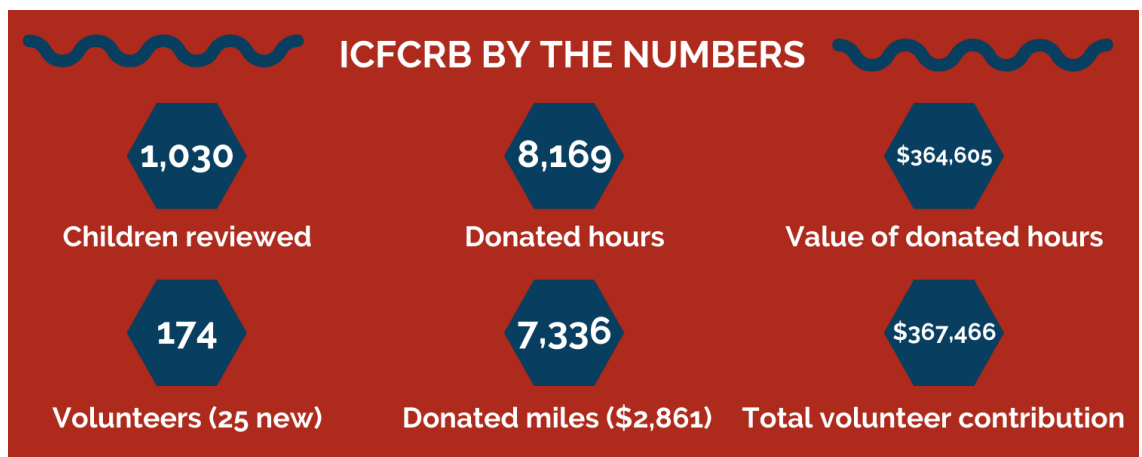




Iowa Citizen Foster Care Review Board Program

Iowa Citizen Foster Care Review Boards (ICFCRB) are mandated by Iowa Code §237.20 to review the case of each child receiving foster care where local boards are established. This is accomplished through the use of trained volunteers approved by the Iowa Child Advocacy Board (ICAB) and appointed by a local judge. These reviews are conducted to determine whether satisfactory progress is being made toward the goals of the case permanency plan pursuant to section §237.22.

Volunteers serving on these boards meet regularly to review case plans, hear from interested parties, and provide the Court and the Department of Human Services (DHS) with their findings and recommendations about the safety, well-being and permanency of children from their communities who are placed in foster care or under the guardianship of DHS. In FY2021 there were 26 local boards reviewing cases in 51 Iowa counties.



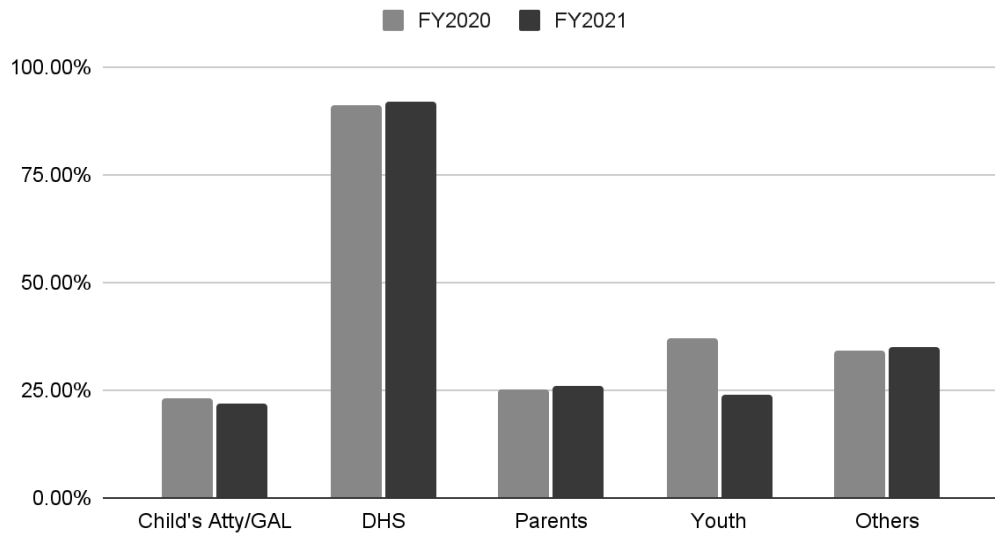
** A total of 1,556 case reviews were held during FY2021 for 1,030 unique children.*

FY21 ICFCRB Program Impact

Participation of Interested Parties at Local Reviews

In an effort to continue active participation by interested parties, a variety of methods were used to provide diverse opportunities for individuals to participate in the local review process. Methods included in-person attendance, submitting statements in written or recorded form, or virtual attendance where technology was available. Participation rates by various parties remained relatively the same as in FY20 with the exception of a decrease in participation by youth (-13%).

Participation at Reviews



Timeliness of Review Reports

All ICFCRB reports were filed and distributed within 15 days of the foster care review pursuant to Iowa Code §237.20(2)(a).

Foster Care Review Board Findings

Local boards make case type specific findings to help measure achievements for children in Iowa's foster care system. These benchmarks relate to important safety, permanency and well-being issues for youth to determine child welfare system strengths and areas needing to be strengthened.



Reunification/Guardianship Case Findings by ICFCRBs	# of Responses	Yes Responses	Percent Yes
1. The Board finds the Case Permanency Plan (CPP) meets timelines and addresses the child(ren)'s current out-of-home placement.	906	769	85%
2. The Board finds the written CPP permanency goal of reunification / guardianship is appropriate for the child(ren).	906	525	58%
3. The Board finds that DHS has developed a concurrent plan for the child(ren).	904	764	84%
4. The Board finds continued out-of-home placement is appropriate while awaiting achievement of the permanency goal.	905	899	99%
5. The Board finds the level of placement is the least restrictive setting available to meet the child(ren)'s needs.	905	903	99%
6. The Board finds DHS made concerted efforts to place the child(ren) with a relative or a person who has a caregiver relationship.	906	866	96%
7. The Board finds DHS made concerted and/or continued efforts to place the child(ren) with siblings. *	707	683	96%
8. The Board finds DHS made concerted efforts to inquire about Indian heritage, notify the tribe, and follow ICWA placement preferences.	904	828	62%
9. The Board finds DHS has ensured appropriate services are in place to make it possible for the family to achieve the permanency goal and services are responsive to the parents' needs.	904	890	98%
10. The Board finds the proximity of the placement to the parental home is consistent with the child(ren)'s best interests, and conducive to achieving the permanency goal of reunification (if applicable).	905	869	96%
11. If youth is 14 years or older, the Board finds DHS has initiated transition planning for the youth. *	189	113	60%
12. The Board finds that the Court has held a permanency hearing within ASFA timelines for the child(ren). *	487	405	83%

(*) Findings 7, 11 and 12 do not apply to all children in foster care due to the child's age at the time of the review, not all children have siblings in care and/or length of time in foster care at the time of the review; percentage is calculated based on the number of applicable cases.

Adoption Case Findings by ICFCRBs	# of Responses	Yes Responses	Percent Yes
1. The Board finds the goal of adoption is appropriate for the child(ren).	502	491	98%
2. The Board finds the Case Permanency Plan (CPP) meets timelines and addresses adoption planning for the child(ren).	502	443	88%
3. The Board finds DHS made concerted efforts to inquire about Indian heritage, notify the tribe, and follow ICWA placement preferences.	501	488	97%
4. The Board finds DHS made concerted efforts to place the child(ren) with a relative or a person who has a caregiver relationship.	502	498	99%
5. The Board finds DHS made concerted and/or continued efforts to place the child(ren) with siblings.	499	397	80%
6. The Board finds the current placement is appropriate to meet the child(ren)'s need for permanency.	501	473	94%
7. The Board finds DHS has ensured appropriate services are in place to safeguard the child(ren)'s safety and well-being.	500	493	99%
8. The Board finds the DHS casework responsibility has been transferred to the adoption specialist.	502	467	93%
9. The Board finds the adoption specialist has met with the child.	502	435	87%
10. The Board finds the child(ren) has a Life Book.	499	134	27%
11. The Board finds the child(ren) will be adopted within 24 months of entering care.	500	199	40%

APPLA Case Findings by ICFCRBs	# of Responses	Yes Responses	Percent Yes
1. The Board finds the court-ordered goal of APPLA is appropriate for the youth and continued out-of-home placement is appropriate until majority age.	96	95	99%
2. The Board finds the Case Permanency Plan (CPP) meets timelines and addresses the youth's current foster care placement.	96	77	80%
3. The Board finds the Case Permanency Plan (CPP), Part C includes the youth's transition plan.	94	72	77%
4. The Board finds the youth has completed the Casey Life Skills Assessment.	96	74	77%
5. The Board finds that a transition planning meeting has been held for the youth.	96	71	74%
6. The Board finds DHS made concerted efforts to inquire about Indian heritage, notify the tribe, and follow ICWA placement preferences.	96	88	92%

7. The Board finds DHS made concerted efforts to place the youth with a relative or a person who has a caregiver relationship.	96	91	95%
8. The Board finds DHS made concerted and/or continued efforts to place the youth with siblings.*	53	50	94%
9. The Board finds the level of placement is the least restrictive setting available to meet the youth's needs.	96	94	98%
10. The Board finds DHS has ensured appropriate services are in place to make it possible for the youth to transition to adulthood.	96	79	82%
11. The Board finds the youth has at least one caring adult in his/her support system.	96	88	92%

(*) Finding 8 does not apply to all youth in foster care as not all of them have siblings in care.

ICFCRB Program Highlights

The coronavirus pandemic impacted the ability of local boards to conduct in-person reviews. A virtual review method was developed and implemented across the state to ensure reviews continued to be held. During the first quarter of FY2021, local review boards transitioned back to conducting in-person reviews. While the pandemic continued to present challenges, FCRB staff and volunteers rose to the challenge and worked with DHS and other interested parties to provide opportunities for participation in addition to in-person attendance through phone conferencing, hybrid models with an option to participate virtually, as well as the long-standing options to provide written or recorded updates for the board's review. A total of 1,556 reviews were conducted in 51 counties served by local boards.

The state's implementation of Family First legislation impacted the number of children in foster care settings who were eligible for foster care reviews. Approximately 200 less children were reviewed in FY2021 compared to the previous fiscal year. The decrease in numbers provided an opportunity to expand into additional counties where citizen foster care review boards were not previously available. Children in foster care in Floyd County are now reviewed by the Bremer-Butler-Floyd-Franklin-Chickasaw board. The Poweshiek Board began reviewing cases from Jasper County in early 2021. With the addition of reviews in Jasper County, all counties in the DHS Service Area 4 (Cedar Rapids) have local citizen review boards. The Child Advocacy Board will continue to monitor the number of children in foster care as well as the availability of local boards and resources as they plan for the future of the FCRB program.



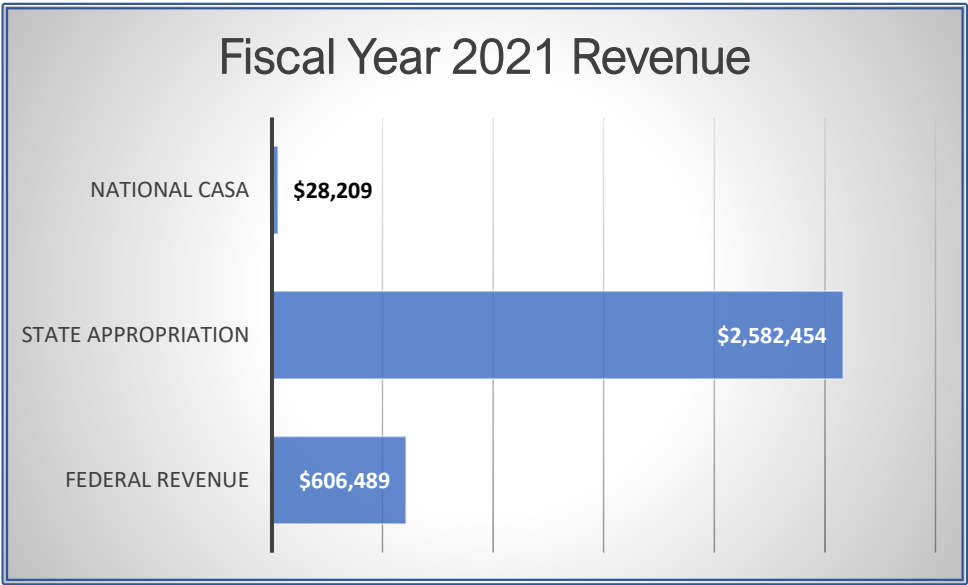
Looking Ahead

Several projects will be launched in FY2022 for the FCRB program. These initiatives include:

- Review of Iowa Code sections 237.15 - 237.22 for proposed legislative updates to better align code requirements with current child welfare and juvenile justice practices.
- Implementation of a pilot foster care review board in Polk County to review the cases of youth who have legal permanency established as another planned permanent living arrangement. The local board will focus on transition planning and services for the youth reviewed.
- Moving the FCRB database to a web-based solution for staff, facilitator and volunteer access for streamlined case management.



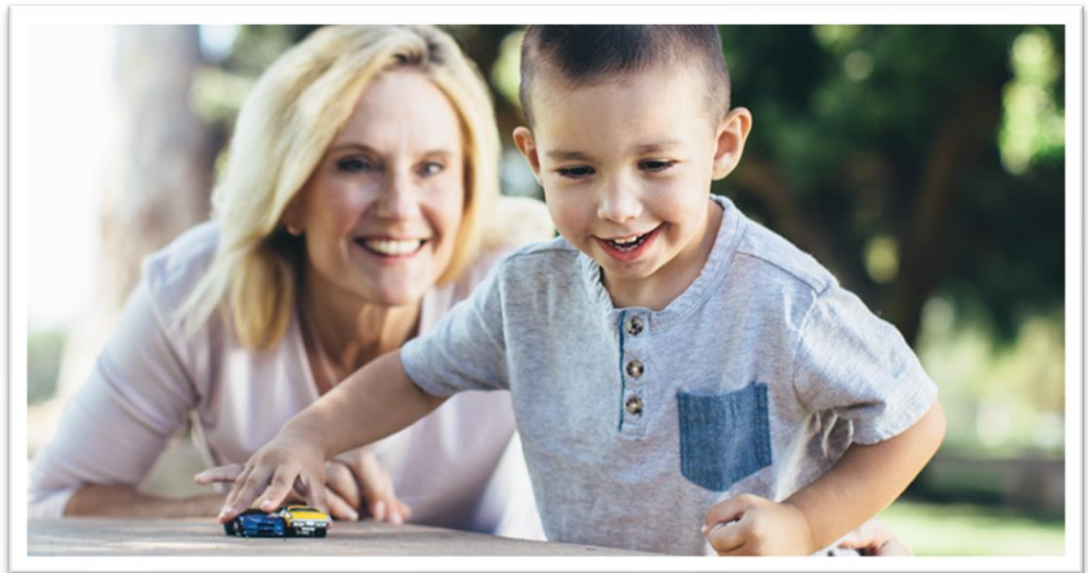
ICAB Financials



Appendix One

Pursuant to Iowa Code 237.18, subsection 2.b., the Iowa Child Advocacy Board is responsible for accumulating data regarding children in foster care. Information provided to ICAB by the Department of Human Services is not all inclusive of the children in out-of-home placements throughout the state. To gain the best understanding of Iowa's Child Welfare data, visit their website at https://dhs.iowa.gov/dashboard_childwelfare.

For FY2021, the Placement Summary dashboard shows 7,556 DHS cases and 818 JCS cases.



While ICAB and DHS serve children from all across the state, of all ages and ethnicities in a variety of placement types, the “typical” Iowa child who entered foster care is Caucasian, five-years old or younger, placed with a relative or fictive kin.

Appendix Two

Foster Care Review Board Evaluation Program Report

Pursuant to Iowa Code §237.18, subsection 6, the Iowa Child Advocacy Board has refined and implemented an annual evaluation program designed to evaluate the effectiveness of citizen reviews in “improving case permanency planning and meeting case permanency planning goals, identify the amount of time children spend in foster care placements, and identify problem issues in the foster care system.”

There are four components to the evaluation program:

1. Annual survey of interested parties
2. Comment card results from local foster care review meetings
3. Barriers to achieving the permanency plan goal identified during local foster care reviews
4. Data on the amount of time children spend in foster care placements

Interested Party Survey Results

Individuals and other stakeholders were invited to complete a program survey regarding the effectiveness of citizen foster care reviews in improving case permanency planning and meeting case permanency planning goals. Participation was significantly down from the previous fiscal year. 96 individuals participated in the FY2021 survey; no youth responded.

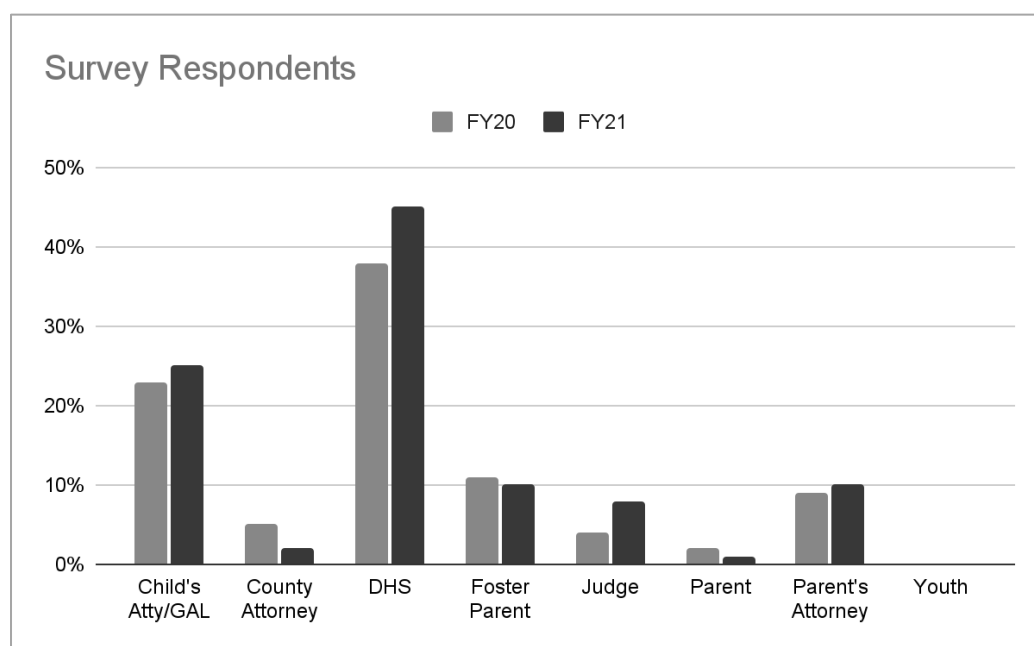


Table 1. Responses to Key Areas of the FCRB Process

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
Citizen reviews adequately address current issues regarding the case permanency plan for children and families	36.46% 35	55.21% 53	5.21% 5	3.13% 3	96
Citizen reviews adequately address progress toward completing the action steps of the case permanency plan	36.46% 35	52.08% 50	8.33% 8	3.13% 3	96
Citizen reviews actively address whether concurrent planning is occurring for children in out-of-home placements	33.33% 32	55.21% 53	8.33% 8	3.13% 3	96
Citizen reviews actively address whether relative searches are occurring for children in out-of-home placements	25.00% 24	54.17% 52	17.71% 17	3.13% 3	96
Citizen reviews actively address progress towards the achievement of legal permanency for children	36.46% 35	55.21% 53	6.25% 6	2.08% 2	96
Citizen reviews focus on the critical needs of children (i.e., educational advocacy, mental health, physical health, placement needs, relational permanence, transition planning, etc.)	37.50% 36	56.25% 54	3.13% 3	3.13% 3	96
Citizen reviews provide an opportunity to identify systemic barriers in the child welfare and/or juvenile justice systems.	29.17% 28	47.92% 46	19.79% 19	3.13% 3	96
Recommendations made by citizen review boards effectively influence case planning for families with children in out-of-home placements	20.83% 20	48.96% 47	22.92% 22	7.29% 7	96

ICFCRB Comment Card Results and Evaluative Feedback

Following each individual case review, all groups of participants are given the opportunity to provide feedback about the review process. The Boards and staff are diligent in their efforts to be respectful and thoughtful in their work and maintain focus on the safety and permanency planning for children. Feedback and evaluation of the review process by interested parties is essential for quality assessment and program improvement.

Each interested party who attends a local review is invited to complete a comment card. Due to the continuation of some virtual reviews going into FY2021, comment cards were not easily accessible to all participants. 442 comment cards were received in FY2021, 37 individuals did not identify their relationship; therefore, they are not accounted for in the table below. In addition to the opportunity to provide open comments, parties are asked to evaluate four areas.



% of IP Group that <u>Agreed</u> with the Statement					
Relation to Child	The review adequately addressed the issues regarding the child's safety and permanency plan	The Board's recommendations will effectively impact case planning	The Board listened and treated me respectfully	Timely notification of reviews was received (at least 10 days prior)	Total Responses
CASA	100%	100%	100%	96%	28
Child's Atty/GAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	20
DHS	99%	98%	100%	99%	125
Foster Parent	98%	100%	100%	92%	84
Parent	88%	80%	93%	95%	40
Parent's Attorney	100%	100%	100%	94%	16
Relative Caregiver	100%	100%	100%	100%	13
Service Provider	95%	89%	92%	95%	38
Youth (14+ yrs)	100%	100%	100%	100%	6
Others	94%	94%	100%	89%	35

Youth Comments

In response to "What did you like best about the review," comments from youth participants included:

- I liked that they listened to me.
- Talking to everyone.
- All of it - very nice.
- They are good listeners.

There were no responses from youth regarding how the FCRB process could be improved.

Barriers for Achievement of Permanency Plan Goals

Barriers that prevent achievement of the permanency plan goal at the time of the review are identified through a discussion between the local board members and the parties in attendance. Given the individual dynamics of cases, more than one barrier may have been identified per case. The topmost identified barriers are noted for each case type reviewed by local foster care review boards.

Cases with the goal of reunification or guardianship

Of 1,938 documented barriers from 711 reviews held,

- 30 had no identified barriers because the achievement of the permanency goal was in process
- 390 of the barriers were parental mental health issues
- 420 of the barriers were parental substance abuse issues
- 324 of the barriers were family economic issues to include lack of stable housing
- 255 of the barriers were lack of progress by parent(s) to alleviate the concerns that led to the removal within 12 months of out-of-home placement.

Cases with the goal of adoption

Of 545 documented barriers from 373 reviews held,

- 107 had no identified barriers because the finalization of adoption was pending
- 62 of the barriers were children who were not in the pre-adoptive home for 180 days at the time of the review
- 60 of the barriers were the DHS selection staffing not being held to determine the pre-adoptive placement
- 46 of the barriers were the youth's special needs are a barrier to securing a pre-adoptive placement.

Cases with the goal of another planned permanent living arrangement

Of 177 documented barriers from 103 reviews held,

- 35 identified that the youth needs employment or job experience
- 29 identified the youth did not have a housing plan as part of the transition plan
- 21 identified that the youth's cognitive ability was a barrier to active involvement in transition planning

Length of Stay in Foster Care

The average length of stay for 3,061 children identified by DHS to be in licensed foster care during June 2021 was 1.42 years.

Conclusions

While respondents generally agreed that citizen reviews adequately address current issues and progress toward completing case plan action steps, there are three areas for improvement identified by the survey respondents. The areas are 1) reviewing whether relative searches are being conducted when children are removed from parental custody, 2) enhancing the process of identifying systemic barriers at the case level with the interested parties, and 3) the need for more effective recommendations from local foster care review boards.

As part of ICAB's continuous improvement plan for the ICFCRB program, emphasis will be placed on volunteer continuing education focused on the key areas identified by survey respondents.

